

05-589 Independent Study Proposal
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Overview

Undergraduates at CMU make important academic and professional decisions throughout their experience- choosing courses, choosing a major/ minor, and making decisions about what they are interested in pursuing after their degree. Classic models of student growth consider the student in a vacuum, with their personal growth and development influenced by surrounding factors and experiences. Yet in reality, students are constantly surrounded by their peers, and often make personal decisions based on social influences.

I am interested in exploring (1) how peer influences and community behavior influence decision making, and (2) how to design systems, supports and experiences that utilize peer interactions to help individuals create more optimal decisions. Specifically, I'm interested in focusing on the context of designing such interventions as part of a college level general education model, working in parallel with the current restructure of Dietrich College's General Education program.

Research Plan

Stage 1: User Research (3 weeks)

Dietrich General Education Committee conducted research into student, faculty, staff and alumni perceptions and attitudes towards the current GenEd program and experience during Spring 2016. I am interested in utilizing the findings of this research and conduct a limited amount of targeted additional user research focused more broadly on peer influences within the decision making process. From this research, I aim to rapidly synthesize the following deliverables.

- Research Findings Synthesis using Affinity Diagram
- Learner Experience Map

Stage 2: Ideation and Rapid Prototyping (5 weeks)

In the interest of evaluating a broad number of solutions and opportunities to be considered, I will employ strategies from contextual design practice, specifically rapid brainstorming and storyboarding to develop ideas to test with key stakeholders.

- Brainstorm 25+ ideas, features etc. in relation to user research
- Storyboard or mock up 2-3 concepts

Stage 3: Collect Feedback

- Informally collect user feedback to concepts through lo-fi storyboards and prototypes
- Create working personas of each stakeholder

Stage 4: Report Findings

- Presentation to students, faculty and staff with usable prototype
- Outline of next steps, cost and opportunities

Time Commitment/ Credit Rationale

This independent study will count for 6 units. The general weekly schedule will be as follows:

- .5 hr group research meeting
- .5 hr independent meeting
- 2 hr interviews with stakeholders

- 3 hr ideation/ brainstorming/ consolidation/ prototyping

Related Research

Peer and Friends and Career Decision Making: A Critical Analysis:

[http://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr22\(8\)14/13.pdf](http://www.idosi.org/mejsr/mejsr22(8)14/13.pdf)

A model of career decision making for college students:

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/0001879179900654>